

ONTARIO'S EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

STRATEGY PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

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Introduction:

The Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario (MANWO), and its youth-wing the Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) value education as a strong foundation for a brighter future. Staying in school and getting a good education opens doors to more opportunities and a better quality of life. Education enables children to break free from the cycle of poverty, and reduces the risk factors for youth being involved in criminal activities. Children are a product of what they inherit from family and the community. Education offers a chance to break free, and transform one's life. It allows individuals to achieve their potential, and contribute to our economic growth and higher living standards.

From past MANWO/RMYC Safer Communities and Safer Schools surveys, Bullying, Drugs, Discrimination and Violence were identified by students in local schools as the top priorities. These issues affect the student's ability to stay in school, learn and succeed. In Thunder Bay and across Northwestern Ontario there are growing incidents of racism, stereotyping, name-calling, prejudice, and discrimination in schools which have an impact on student attrition.

As groups committed to multiculturalism, diversity and social justice, MANWO and the RMYC welcome Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy to level the playing field by creating an equitable and inclusive education system that meets the needs of a changing and diverse population. Hence our work with the Ministry of Education, Lakehead Public Schools, the Thunder Bay District Catholic School Board, and Nishnawbe Aski Nation to raise awareness on Ontario's plan to achieve an equitable and inclusive school climate where all members of the school community feel safe and accepted.

The RMYC launched the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy project at the 4th annual Youth Embracing Diversity in Education (YEDE) Conference hosted by the Lakehead Public School Board on February 9, 2011. To engage students and help them to reap the benefits of a good education, a work plan was developed with the following goals and objectives:

GOALS: Working with schools to implement Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy where all students, parents, and other members of the community are welcomed and respected, and every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning.

OBJECTIVES:

- * To create a Working Group of student representatives from various schools to provide input and feedback on what is happening in their respective schools with regards to students concerns and what they need to see to create a safe and healthy learning environment.
- * To promote Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy in Thunder Bay and across the region in order to create an inclusive and equitable school climate that enables students to achieve their highest potential.
- * To empower students and youth through presentations, focus groups, forums and workshops where they discuss how Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy can be implemented in schools to address their issues and enhance their ability to learn and succeed.
- * To provide guidance and support for students through partnerships with community and peer groups that can help to review inclusive and equity policies, monitor implementation, assess outcomes, encourage creation of student advisory committees to monitor impact of equity policies in schools, and provide feedback to school staff, administration, school councils, and trustees.
- * To organize forums for students to share their concerns on discrimination, and brainstorm ideas to involve their peers, student councils and their schools in a proactive approach to make schools more inclusive.
- * To engage schools at the community level and work with students, teachers, school administration, school councils and trustees to establish mechanisms and benchmarks to monitor progress created by the policies.

PRELIMINARY CONSULTATIONS – STUDENTS’ FORUM

Original plans for a major project were scaled down when Ministry of Education funding was reduced from \$25,000.00 to \$5,000.00. The workplan was revised and priorities were outlined. A preliminary forum was held at Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School on April 20, 2011, to discuss effective ways to engage students in the project. Sixty eight students participated in workshops to assess awareness of Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and review strategies to promote the government’s and school boards’ equity and inclusion policies.

The students were asked seven questions, and the responses were as follows.

1. Are You Aware of Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy?

YES: 20 NO: 48. Only the RMYC school contacts were aware of the Strategy due to the project we had developed. All the other student leaders and student council members were not familiar with the policy. Leaflets of the strategy were handed out to all the participants.

On what should be done to make students more aware, suggestions included the following:

- Advertising: posters and announcements
- Handout information pamphlets/handouts
- Have a booth in job fairs
- Host conferences and hold meetings (i.e. RMYC Equity and inclusive Community Leadership conferences)
- Invite more people to events like the YEDE conference
- Give presentations and speeches (can use the auditorium)
- Give presentations in and out of schools
- More school presentations, workshops, and fun events
- Create school activities and booths
- Make the strategy more present in school education so that everyone can be aware, not just those who attend the conference; include in the curriculum
- Make the strategy more prominent within the schools by discussing it within groups and clubs (e.g.. Natural Helpers)

2. Do you feel that all students are included in school activities? Why?

YES: 0 NO: 68 The reasons given why students feel excluded are:

- Due to race, culture, ethnicity
- Difference in grade/age
- Appearance (i.e. size)
- Difference in religion such as Moslems, Jews, Sikhs, etc.
- Exclusion caused by bullying
- Exclusion due to homophobia
- Favouritism by teachers, coaches and supervisor biased towards certain students
- Minorities not being acknowledged during activities i.e. sports, music, athletes, etc.
- Language barriers i.e. new immigrants, refugees, students from reserves
- Intelligence
- Some do not know what to get involved in
- Reluctance due to lack of self confidence and understanding of self-worth (10)

3. Are all students accepted by their teachers and/or peers at school? Why?

Students-Students NO: 68 YES: 0

Teachers-Students NO: 61 Yes: 7

1) Discrimination occurs between both teachers to students and students to students

- appearance and interests
- race/ethnicity
- age
- religion/beliefs
- sexual orientation

2) Bullying between students

- Verbal bullying
- Cyber bullying
- Exclusion

- 3) Students are unaware of how their actions affect others (i.e. excluding others)
- 4) Students tend to "group off" and this can be intimidating to others
- 5) Some are prejudice due to who one associates with
- 6) Teacher may base their opinions of students on academic performance
- 7) Students who excel in other areas than academic are not viewed in as a high standing
- 8) Students and staff assume authority/superiority over the "weak"
- 9) Many teachers treat students of different ethnicity's differently
- 10) Generally teachers try to accept all students

"Not everyone is accepted all the time and could be made fun of or not respected all the time, but that doesn't mean people don't try."

4. Do you feel students know where to go to report problems? Where can they go?

YES: 48

NO: 20

- 1) Adult of authority/trusted adult
- 2) Principal and vice principals
- 3) The Administration office
- 4) Office
- 5) Guidance office (student services)
- 6) Guidance/Aboriginal counsellor (3)
- 7) Teachers
- 8) Peer leaders/natural helpers
- 9) Peers
- 10) Parents
- 11) Student Council

"The issue is students don't report incidents because they are afraid of retaliation, and feel that it will resort to something bad."

"It depends on the problem really. Sometimes students know exactly where to go (office, teachers, etc.), but sometimes they struggle for a location."

5. Do you feel that student's complaints are handled very well? How so?

YES: 29 NO: 39 *(Usually depends on other factors)*

- Staff neglect /avoid dealing with issues (often after assuring that issue will be dealt with)
- Staff members have difficulty finding a proportional solution to problems.
- Too much or too little is done to fix the issue
- Often complaints are not taken seriously
- The smaller problems are overlooked; only the bigger problems are dealt with
- Some teachers and other staff tend follow the statement: "if we didn't see anything we can't do anything"
- Some students are ignored; teachers put more effort in helping those with a higher academic standing
- Staff give reasons why not to feel emotional rather than solving the problem
- Complaints are considered thoroughly and actions are taken to address the complaint
- If an issue is brought to attention, actions occur to handle it immediately with authority
- Punishment are decided by the school, and parents are informed
- Generally every issue is taken seriously
- Complaints are dealt through talking instead of violence
- Some students feel reluctant to seek assistance from staff as they fear the possible consequences
- Some complaints are too difficult to handle well
- Depends on the person that is helping

6. Please list the common problems experienced by students at your school.

- 1) Drug and alcohol use and abuse/ Too much partying
- 2) Bullying
- 3) Racism
- 4) Homophobia
- 5) Teen pregnancy
- 6) Theft / crime
- 7) Poverty and Financial difficulties
- 8) Fighting

- 9) Partnership issues (boyfriend, girlfriend, gossip, etc.
- 10) Dropping out of school/failing to attend class
- 11) Poor grades (not getting help for homework, feeling neglected, lack of confidence)
- 12) Talked down to by teachers and peers
- 13) Lack of/poor education
- 14) Stress with academic problems, homework, assignments, tests, exams
- 15) Peer pressure
- 16) Exclusion
- 17). Discrimination
 - sexual orientation
 - ethnicity/race
 - religion
 - physical appearance
 - belief/attitudes
 - elitism
 - mental health
- 18) Family issues such as divorce, neglect, job loss, poverty, etc.

“A majority of students say that the most common problems they see are associated with discrimination – racism, homophobia, appearance, weight, etc. Too many students crack jokes, and don’t realize the hurt and pain this brings.”

“Bullying - it could be as simple as saying you’re kidding about something, but there is always a hint of truth to a statement”

7. **Any suggestion you have to improve the learning environment at your school so that all students feel safe, included, and accepted?**
 - 1) Train and encourage teachers to reach out to the students and become involved with what is happening in and out of school and to take a more active approach to stop bullying
 - 2) Have guidance counsellors meet with students every month, to assess their progress in school, and their relationships in and out of school
 - 3) Hire and train more counsellors

- 4) Support groups (e.g. for discussing issues to feel that you are welcome to talk about it to adults in the school or anywhere else)
- 5) Promote groups of acceptance (i.e. GSA, Group hugs)
- 6) More Natural Helper involvement
- 7) Work with NWOSSSA / Student Councils
- 8) More workshops on bullying
- 9) Make students aware of the inclusion program and promote inclusion throughout the school (to make everyone feel comfortable with their surroundings)
- 10) Provide more clubs and activities with a variety to have something for everyone
- 11) Use games, music, videos, etc. that influence students to promote equality
- 12) Work together to create an improved and healthier environment (Treat the environment with respect and improve it: no ripped walls, broken windows, vandalized stalls, etc.)
- 13) More security
- 14) Create safe spaces in the hallways and classrooms
- 15) Make more effective punishment for bullying
- 16) Uniforms
- 17) Include more/other cultural classes; Native and Korean languages etc.

FORUM FOLLOW-UP

Feedback from the forum confirmed the need for the Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy in our schools. Participants identified the problems and offered suggestions to address issues confronting students. A preliminary survey revealed that an overwhelming majority of students are not aware of the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. While many students want to see the school environment improve and have concrete suggestions to offer, they are not aware of the policy that would facilitate the process.

There is a wide gap that exists between the problems of inclusion, and awareness of the formal strategy to deal with the issues students experience at school. Current efforts do not seem to be working, or are ineffective to engage students. Obviously, more work needs to be done to inform both students and staff about Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. The RMYC decided to conduct a publicity blitz in all the high schools this fall. The Youth Council's Working Group would lead this initiative in all the high schools.

SUMMER, FALL AND WINTER PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

As part of the RMYC summer experience program, the Youth Council visited eight Thunder Bay neighbourhoods in July and August to talk about safety concerns, and what could be done to better protect children and youth. This initiative was a follow-up to past community surveys the Youth Council regularly conducts on social priorities affecting children and youth.

To get many families to participate, the Youth Council organized barbecues and games for the children and youth. The youth designed promotional posters and leaflets that were dropped off in mailboxes of all houses in targeted neighbourhoods two days before the events. On the actual day, teams of youths trained to interact with people, handle food, supervise kids, and gather information were deployed. There were large flip charts with different questions about local priorities, concerns, suggestions for solutions, and the supports parents and children needed for healthy lives. Markers were handed out to those who came out to write comments before proceeding to enjoy the hotdogs and juice. For those who could not write, the youth were glad to do it for them. The Youth Council also sent teams of youths door-to-door with survey sheets to interview those who stayed home.

In addition to general questions about social priorities, the RMYC asked what the residents would like to tell the Mayor, City Council, Police Chief, and the School Boards. The following is a summary of the comments we gathered directed at the boards of education to improve the learning environment in schools. They are not ranked.

What would you like to tell the School Board?

- Find more diverse teachers to serve as role models
- Have more cultural activities/celebrations to raise awareness and reduce prejudice
- Include social justice and equality in the curriculum
- Make sure bullying is a big NO NO. Deal with it decisively
- Control the use of foul language
- Encourage interaction between cultures and races

- Treat everyone fairly. Help marginalized students to feel included
- Teach students about safety, tell them to respect each other stay in school, you will reach your dreams
- Please have safe accountable housing for native youth from reserves studying in Thunder Bay schools / more cultural programs
- Respect all cultures. Stop racism
- All students should feel accepted and not judged
- More aboriginal resource centres in schools
- Get us to feel welcome in schools, so that we graduate
- Concentrate on educating people on the effects of difference drugs, and how to help others. More information on prevention. It's really bad
- Create a healthy place for learning. Be nice to all students.
- More support for poor families, snacks and clothes for poor kids
- More aboriginal culture in schools to reduce ignorance and racism
- Aboriginal liaisons and supports for native youth to help them stay in school
- Help out people that are trying to get all of their high school credits, not to put down people having problems with reading, writing and spelling.

Over 1,000 leaflets were handed out during the community barbecues where an overwhelming majority said they had not heard about Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Many people were not aware of the school boards' policies on the same, and were not so sure how effective they would be. They welcomed the idea, and hoped that the government as the funder of the schools should monitor the application of the policies and ensure that they are fully implemented. Even though residents were aware of Parent Councils, many are convinced that without the leadership and commitment from the government, not much will change.

On the role parents could play, many doubted their personal impact because of their social status and the areas where they lived. Those living in public housing projects felt that their complaints would make a difference. They believed that the big school boards had other priorities, and powerful teachers' unions would not be influenced by poor parents and their 'troubled' kids. at the various events.

FALL AND WINTER CAMPAIGN – SCHOOL SURVEYS

When school resumed in the fall, the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy Working Group met during the RMYC Saturday planning meetings to review the feedback from the spring workshop. There was overwhelming consensus on the need to raise awareness of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy in all the high schools namely: Hammarskjold, Sir Winston Churchill, Superior, and Wetgate—Lakehead Public Schools; and St. Ignatius and St. Patrick—Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board.

The Working Group brainstormed ideas to promote the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Assemblies and class presentations were the most effective ways to engage students in discussions to understand and appreciate the policies. However, the sizes of the schools meant large assemblies, or many class-room visits. This required time to train teams to acquire skills and develop self-confidence to make the presentations and lead the discussions. It also meant more planning to schedule assemblies and book the class presentations.

Due to time constraints and the need to get things done before the end of the project, it was suggested that we use the same approach the RMYC uses to gather input and feedback on issues and priorities in community neighbourhoods. This process involves setting up flip-charts and getting people to write their comments. Therefore, students would be invited to respond to specific topics. All high school principals were contacted for support to conduct the survey. Working Group members made the announcements to promote the survey, invited students to come and participate and handed out leaflets. Over 3,000 leaflets were printed for distribution.

To simplify the process and encourage mass student participation, the RMYC and the Working Group came up with a following standard message for the high schools:

*"ATTENTION! ATTENTION! All _____ (Mascot), do you want to improve your school? Do you want a more welcoming school community? All this week we are promoting **Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.***

Now, what does this mean to you? Well come on down to _____ (place) at lunch to find out, and give your input on how to improve our school." See you there! Thank you!"

For convenience, the RMYC provided posters, markers and flip-chart paper with sub-headings for students to mark or write down their responses. RMYC members and the Working Group team talked with the students about the survey, handed out the 2-page Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy leaflet, and encouraged those who came to write their comments.

All the school principals were supportive of the promotional campaign and helped with the site selection. The youth-to-youth approach was very effective. Approximately one thousand students participated in the survey, and many took leaflets. There were line-ups of students eager to share their comments on four pre-selected topics. We ranked the responses as follows:

Reasons students are excluded at school:

Appearance

Weight

Race

Homophobia

Clothes

Attitude

Beliefs

Disability

Athletic Ability

Family Wealth

Intelligence

Where you live

Manners

Religion

Gender

Addictions

Ignorance

Language

What can schools do to stop discrimination? :

Pow wows

Assemblies

Awareness
Conferences
Cultural Activities
Consequences
Guest Speakers
Multicultural Days
Natural Helpers
Presentations
School Uniforms
Suspensions
Teacher Training
Workshops
Punishment
Detention
Team-building exercises
Supervision
Student cultural exchanges

Common problems students face at school:

Bullying
Drugs
Discrimination
Violence
Threats / Rude students
Gangs
Hazing
Intimidation
Biased teachers/Insensitive teachers/Prejudiced teachers
Not being taken seriously
Students' complaints not being acted on
Unfair treatment by teachers and peers / Being judged unfairly
Ignorant people

Are you aware of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy?*

NO: 85%

YES: 15%

- * *A majority of students who knew about the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy said they learned about it at the YEDE Conference, from the RMYC Working Group, and through participating in the Youth Council's forums and meetings. Many students said that they are not aware of the two school boards' policies.*

INPUT AND FEEDBACK

Students, teachers and staff at school during the days of the survey heard the public announcements about Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Judging from the numbers that came to check the information and participate in the study, the promotion went well. The youth-to-youth strategy to market the project and engage students in the survey attracted many participants, and got them involved in the process.

After the surveys, the RMYC and the Working Group held a series of meetings to review and analyze the results. Bullying, drug abuse, discrimination based on appearance, weight, sexual orientation, race, clothes, family wealth, violence, poverty, manners, attitude, mental health are major problems and a reflection of social problems and symptoms of issues in families and the community. The RMYC has identified many of the same issues in past studies. Unfair treatment, biases, stereotypes, marginalization and exclusion confirms the need an Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, as well as complementary policies and proactive initiatives to create a healthy learning environment for everyone.

The Working Group team members were encouraged to meet with the school principals in their respective schools. They shared the survey results, and had to find out what the school was doing to deal with the students' priorities. From the discussions, the Youth Council learned about various initiatives being undertaken by schools to complement the Ministry of Education's directives. The challenge was engaging students, parents and the community in the process.

We welcome initiatives such as Natural Helpers, Restorative Practices, Mental Health Initiatives, Breakfast Clubs, Orientation Barbecues, Staff Patrols, Assemblies, Safe Spaces and so forth that involve and engage students in issues they are passionate about. However, the major hurdle of creating student clubs is the availability of teachers and staff to supervise and guide the students. Limited financial resources are also a factor restricting the activities and events student clubs can organize and out-reach to get more students to participate.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy project was launched during the Lakehead Public School Board's 4th Youth Embracing Diversity in Education (YEDE) Conference on February 9, 2011. To wind down the project, the RMYC used the 5th YEDE Conference on May 8, 2012 to gather final input. The Youth Council facilitated three consecutive workshops on "Racism and Aboriginal Issues" and used the sessions to review the impact of the project.

Feedback from over one hundred student leaders at the conference confirmed the survey findings. Exclusion is a common problem in that needs addressing. From various interactive exercises during the workshops, students highlighted how exclusion and discrimination based on negative judgements impacted them. Many of the students were not very familiar with Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and the school boards policies to make schools more welcoming and safer. They also felt that more should be done to promote the complaint process and the channels to have students' issues addressed fairly.

Students want more information on what presently exists to create a more inclusive and safer learning environment for everyone. Creative ways are needed to foster diversity and build team spirit. Teachers must be more proactive in dealing with diversity, differences and discrimination. All students should be treated fairly, and schools must sternly reprimand anyone committing offences that hurt, harm, or discriminate against others.

On May 15, 2012, the RMYC met separately with senior administration of the Lakehead Public Schools and the Thunder Bay Catholic District Board at their respective offices. The survey results, comments from the school principals and feedback from the YEDE Conference were discussed, and successful initiatives shared as best practices. The Youth Council wants school boards to build on the success stories and expand on programs popular with students. From the meeting, priorities were highlighted and ideas developed to improve the school environment.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the RMYC and Working Group's suggestions to improve the learning environment in our schools. The Youth Council feels that the recommendations will enhance implementation of the equity and inclusion policies so that all students are treated equitably and feel included to realize their learning potential.

Schools and School Boards:

1. *From the project, we learned that many students and parents are not aware of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and the local school board's policies on the same. If the Strategy is to make a difference, stakeholders should be engaged, become familiar with the contents, and encouraged to participate in the implementation process.*

The Ministry of Education supported this project because the Ontario government wants to create an education system where all students in our publicly funded schools have the opportunity to achieve their highest potential. Familiarity with the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and, school boards' policies will enhance our understanding and appreciation of what is at stake. School boards are doing a lot of good things to improve the school environment so that students are safe, learn well, and succeed. While teachers may be very familiar with the initiatives taking place, students and parents do not seem to well informed on what is already happening to take full advantage of the opportunities, resources, services and programs to improve situations.

Therefore: Schools should develop new ways to disseminate information to enlighten the community on what they are doing to deal with students' issues. They should formally educate everyone on equity and inclusion policies, codes of conduct and grievance procedures. Creative ways must be found to promote the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, school board policies, complaint processes, intervention to address problems and proactive ways resolve conflict and foster inclusion. Schools are already teaching personal growth and 'Character Development' as an integral part of student academic achievement. The same should apply to equity and inclusion as courses in the curriculum to build character and enhance empathy and acceptance of diversity.

2. *Student engagement implies involvement and participation in the learning process. Experience with the RMYC shows that young people appreciate meaningful engagement as part of a learning process--to help shape their world and destiny. Students should be involved in resolving issues they identify as problems. It should not be the task of school administration alone to deal with school safety, but a partnership with students as stakeholders. Their ideas must be appreciated, and opinions respected.*

To ensure that students are actively engaged, there should be open channels of communication for input and feedback to address their concerns and improve the situation. It is important to recognize and give incentives such as school awards, course credits and so forth to motivate students to be involved in planning and organizing activities that nurture an inclusive school spirit. Young people appreciate meaningful participation as part of growing up and learning to they face, and should be included in the decision-making process as part of the solution. Change will not come if we continue doing things the same old way. We need to think 'outside the box', and find new ways to tap into students' potential to help make schools more inclusive and safer.

It is important to regularly consult with students and hear concerns from their perspective and solicit ideas on what can be done to solve the problems. Current high enrolments in schools require that principals find new ways to communicate with students from different racial, social and cultural backgrounds. Educators need training to listen, to be open-minded, fair and respectful of our diversity. This will ensure that all students are heard, and their issues acknowledged and dealt with fairly. Safer ways for students to say what is bugging them, and share their ideas to improve their situations will make them feel connected to the school. Better communication between school administration and students creates a better and healthier learning and working environment for everyone.

- * **Therefore:** Schools should engage students as stakeholders for the implementation of equity and inclusive education policies, and make them part of the solution to the problems they face at school. New channels should be explored and created for student input and feedback. School assemblies and student advisory committees made up of monitors selected from each home-room class can liaise with student councils, and meet at least once a month to discuss safety issues. Committee members would be trained for their role, and serve as an additional voice for students. This will provide another source of information for school administration to deal with equity and inclusion issues.

3. *Discrimination is often based on ignorance and creates artificial barriers that lead to exclusion, and schools play a role to educate and enlighten society on diversity. Racism and homophobia have long been recognized as common problems associated with discrimination and hate crimes. Racist and homophobic attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices are learned and the fears passed on to children. The name-calling, verbal assaults, bullying and fights that exacerbate tensions, create barriers, divide students and make victims feel unwanted or unwelcome from the main school activities.*

From the surveys, appearance, weight, clothes, family wealth, intelligence/mental health featured prominently as reasons students feel discriminated against and excluded at school. These variables add to the numbers of vulnerable students and victims, and schools need to take proactive steps to contain these problems. Education plays an important role in changing attitudes and modifying behaviour. Teaching multiculturalism and exposing students to diversity in hands-on activities and practical interactions will enhance understanding promote respect, acceptance, tolerance, human dignity, understanding, tolerance, caring, fairness, and other social values that improve race relations. Learning about diversity allows students to be inclusive and prepares them to work in a multicultural society and global village. Many students feel that Pow Wows will help to build bridges of understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal people and culture.

- * **Therefore:** Human rights, discrimination and diversity should be included in the school curriculum. This will enable teachers to lead enlightened discussions and dialogue on equity and inclusion on issues such as appearance, weight, clothes, family wealth, homophobia, racism and so forth. Assemblies and presentations at school and teaching about Canadian Multiculturalism and the Canadian Charter of Rights in class enhances awareness of human rights, social justice, equity, inclusion, diversity and empathy.

Schools should build on existing discipline measures to prevent and clean up racist, homophobic and other discriminatory graffiti, stop students from wearing clothes with offensive language to school, and deal decisively with hate crime and potentially threatening situations for racialized and minority students. Safe spaces and policies to create a healthy learning environment should be communicated to students and parents.

Schools should encourage and support students to organize events that enhance their understanding and appreciation of diversity. Participating in human rights days, March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Pride 'Pink' Days Pow Wows and so forth will foster awareness, tolerance, and celebration of our diversity.

4. *Peer support groups and 'buddy' programs help students to deal with personal issues, meet new acquaintances, and gain a sense of belonging. For example, supports for grade nines can help them to deal with transition into high school where they get lost after the responsibilities and attention as seniors in the last years of elementary school. Loss of status in a new high school and trying to make friends can be difficult and traumatic. This often makes students entering new schools vulnerable. The need to fit and feel they belong can leads some students to be mixed up with the wrong crowd. Joining any cliques for the sake of belonging causes problems and exacerbates the divisions current Equity and Inclusive Education policies now need to address.*

- * **Therefore:** Schools should improve orientation programs, organize school tours, host socials, barbecues etc. to welcome students and ease transition woes. Peer mentoring programs such as Natural Helpers, and proactive initiatives such as the RMYC's Girl Power and Brothers groups should be supported to reduce feelings of alienation, and encourage students to help each other. There is a need to create group leaders and teams of senior students, provide orientation and training to enable them to work with individual students, or small groups of junior students. Meetings can be held at school during lunch, after-school, etc for peer support, advice, or just to talk. Confidentiality would apply to personal matters, unless there are security risks or threats of harm. This could help students to deal with bullying, discrimination, drugs, violence, and so forth.

5. *Mentoring programs for new immigrant and aboriginal students from remote reserves are effective at facilitating their integration into large city schools. Senior students trained to work with newcomers feel included can serve as positive role models and peer helpers. Assisting new students to find their way around, deal with culture shock, shyness, language barriers and so forth will reduce feelings of alienation that can pressure vulnerable students joining wrong cliques just to fit in. Creating teams of students with helping hands widens the pool of empathetic peers promoting inclusion and acceptance.*

- * **Therefore:** Schools should create a host program and supports for Aboriginal students from reserves coming to study in the city, and for immigrant and refugee children new to the country. A welcome wagon-like service for new students is needed to familiarize them with the school setting, reduce culture shock, and assist immigrant and First Nations youths integrate into large multicultural schools. This will facilitate integration into the new schools, decrease stress of relocating, help students to fit in and succeed.

6. *Many students are not quite aware of how to lodge complaints, and whether they would be protected from victimization, retaliation, etc. This creates situations where not many complaints are made, and teachers do not get a full picture of what is going on, and are not well versed with the issues that are really going on to deal with them accordingly.*

Good publicity, and student-friendly methods to report complaints will help to solve problems, minimize conflicts and reduce tensions. Students know the bullies, where the fights are, who is dealing drugs, or doing what to whom, and so forth. A simple and confidential way of reporting problems will encourage students to come forward and register their complaints for school authorities to know. Encouraging students to express how they would like to see the matters resolved engages and empowers victims to be part of the solution. Giving students a voice and creating a record of complaints ensures that they will not be ignored, and ideas shared with authorities will help solve problems.

- * **Therefore:** Schools should review existing grievance procedures to ensure that the reporting process is simple and student-friendly. A complaint process similar to the popular 'Crime Stoppers' model should be promoted to report bullying, discrimination, crime, and other situations pertaining to students' safety. Simple forms such as the RMYC's Racial Incident Reporting Form should be used to record problems, and solicit students' input to resolve the issue. Grievance procedures should be well-publicized, and convenient to use. Teachers can work with class monitors, and student councils to support students reporting incidents, and help to monitor fairness and progress.

7. *Poverty is on the rise in Thunder Bay, and more families are finding it hard to make ends meet. More people are unemployed, and there is a rapidly growing Aboriginal population food banks, public housing and welfare to make ends meet. Hence, family wealth, clothes, use of breakfast clubs, etc. are affecting more families, and unfortunately carry negative stigma among students.*

Families in public housing projects and from low-income neighbourhoods are concerned about unfair and biased treatment, the stereotyping, prejudice and indifference by teachers and staff they attribute to where they live. Parents who relocate from affluent areas to housing projects due to job loss, change in economic status, or family break-ups notice that they and their children are treated differently after the move. Their complaints do not get fair attention, and when their children get into trouble they are treated more harshly. Teachers' indifference and biases towards students from low income families and neighbourhoods contribute to their gradual disengagement from participating, and being included in school activities. .

- * **Therefore:** Teachers must treat all students fairly and equitably, and not stigmatize or judge them based on where they come from. Schools should keep profiles of the neighbourhoods where their students come from, and develop appropriate interventions and supports to address the unique needs of each student. Understanding the challenges all students face, particularly those from low-income families who are adversely affected by poverty, and providing programs and services that will enhance their learning potential, tap into their natural skills and talents will make a difference. Teachers should be aware of the gaps and barriers that exist among students, be sensitive to their unique needs, and endeavour to address them fairly without prejudice.
8. *From the survey, clothes are a factor for exclusion. With poverty on the rise, it is difficult for some parents to afford fashionable clothes for their kids to fit in and be accepted by their peers. Some students would rather skip, or drop out, than deal with embarrassment of not putting on the latest fashions. A decade ago, the RMYC developed a position paper on school uniforms used by the Catholic Board to successfully promote school uniforms among parents. Student Councils and class monitors can help to market the idea for school uniforms in public schools. They can assist in selecting popular colours and designs from potential suppliers, and help to implement the dress code.*

In the discussions, the problem of discrimination based on clothes does not exist in Catholic high schools where there are school uniforms. Other schools can solve this problem by introducing uniforms or a more formal dress code incorporating the school mascot colours. Students would be invited to provide input on the design, and Student Councils and class monitors can be brought on side to work with school administration to engage other students in the process.

- *. **Therefore:** School uniforms or a semi-formal dress code should be introduced in all high schools to promote decency, neatness, and make every student feel included. This will eliminate undue pressure on both students and parents to pay fortunes for designer clothes they cannot afford. Getting rid of the 'fashion contest' in schools would take care of the social class labelling, superficial discrimination, and tensions accentuated by attire, so that students can focus on learning and completing high school.

9. *Attending high school can make or break a student. Wanting to be accepted by peers is a natural feeling, and the need to fit-in exerts a lot of peer pressure. From the survey, being judged by peers and teachers is an on-going reality. The publicly funded education system is for everyone, and problems are magnified when students from diverse backgrounds, different neighbourhoods and economic status are bussed to the same schools. There is a need to teach tolerance, empathy and acceptance for inclusive interaction to accommodate unique physical differences such as weight.*

As family wealth, appearance, weight and clothes gain prominence as reasons students are excluded, our publicly funded education system should respond accordingly. Schools are the foundation for academic and social enlightenment that can counter media influence on issues such as body image, fashions, designer clothes, social status, and so forth that hurt and divide students. An institution responsible for educating the nation, and developing and shaping future minds should ensure that all students are included.

- *. **Therefore:** Schools should be proactive in dealing with new priorities of weight and appearance, and find creative ways for everyone to feel included. Mandatory gym-time at school to promote fitness can help to address weight problems. More structured physical exercises for all students will complement the government's initiatives to combat obesity – a growing health concern that is costly and has an impact on the well-being of children and youth. Providing opportunities for students to be physically active, and promoting healthy eating habits at school will make a difference.
10. *Violence, intimidation, discrimination, bullying and various forms of misunderstandings common in all schools can be addressed through dialogue, mediation and reconciliation. In all schools, we heard of divisions between native and white students. There is not much mixing, and name calling and bullying are common. It is often the 'white' students making racial taunts, and when problems are reported, teachers often do not do much.*

The teachers' indifference often results in the aboriginal students taking matters into their own hands. Native youths banding together for safety and self-protection are often seen as gang members. If they hit back and a fight occurs, teachers generally just separate the students, and it is the native students who usually get suspended or expelled. When police are called, the shy and soft-spoken Aboriginal students often get blamed for instigating the assault. The laying of charges creates tensions that can lead to ganging up and fights. Consequently many native students feel that they are welcome in city schools, say that they are not treated fairly because teachers and police officers are not on their side. This leads to a majority of them dropping out of school.

New approaches are needed to build bridges of understanding among all students so that aboriginal, racialized and other minorities feel included. Mediation is a proactive approach to resolve conflict and settle arguments with both sides engaged and providing input. Teachers need the skills to work with students and parents and get them to be part of the solution problems encountered at school. Teachers can identify potential peer leaders who can learn to listen to what is going on when disputes arise and adjudicate fairly. Trained teachers who understand the mediation process can help victims and perpetrators to reach mutual agreement and reconcile to avoid holding grudges, fear of revenge and retaliation which escalate tension and perpetuate divisive conflict.

- *. **Therefore:** Schools need to introduce and support mediation and restorative practices training for both teachers and students. Providing teachers with mediation skills to work with will enable them to engage students in conflict resolution and develop student mediators who can work with their peers encouraging them to talk things out and reconcile. This enables them to play an active role in finding solutions to problems. Mediation encourages teachers and students to work through differences instead of fighting about and fuelling acrimony. Teachers must be trained to teach students alternative ways to resolve problems and learn to get along.

11. *Safety is a major concern among students. Bullying, assaults and other forms of violence create anxiety and stress that can result in students missing school, skipping classes, or dropping out. The large spread-out schools with high enrolments can create problems of supervising students and watching out for drug and alcohol abuse. Teachers cannot be everywhere and school bus drivers cannot monitor students while driving. New technology and creative means can be applied to enhance safety for all students.*

- * **Therefore:** Schools should have more teacher, staff, police, security and volunteer patrols in hallways and school grounds for students' safety. Technology such as surveillance cameras should be utilized in buses, in and around schools to deter bullying, violence, drug runners and bootleggers. Sniffer dogs will discourage drug use in schools.
12. *Many students prefer principals, teachers and staff who are involved in their lives, and not treat them just as pupils in their care until the bell rings. With growing numbers of single parent homes, family break-ups, poverty, diversity, gender issues, racism, discrimination and so forth, students need to be inspired to reach their potential. Schools educate the nation and teachers have a great impact on students' lives. Empathy, ability to communicate, be culturally sensitive and understand will engage all students. In Thunder Bay, it is important to engage Aboriginal students, teach their language to instil pride, build self-esteem and reduce feelings of exclusion in large predominantly white schools. Hiring more staff students can identify with enhances feelings of belonging, improves school attendance, reduces dropouts, and increases graduates.*
- * **Therefore:** School boards should hire qualified school principals, teachers and staff who reflect the social diversity and gender balance of the community and student population. This will enable educators to communicate with all students, serve as role models, and inspire them to realize their potential. Understanding cultural and racial issues is critical to engaging a diverse student population and influences them to change
13. *Schools are more than buildings and equipment. They are as good as the teachers who become significant others to help students sort through their problems. Good high schools have good teachers who guide, motivate, inspire and create opportunities for students to learn, grow, develop their potential as peer leaders and so forth. They take custody of children during the day to become surrogate parents, guardians, and so forth.*

Respect is reciprocal and should be earned. Therefore, teachers need training to understand social conditions, ailments, mental health issues to treat all students fairly. Professional development sessions will enhance the teachers' abilities to get the best out of their students. Those who fail to connect with students, reciprocate mutual respect, or cannot serve as models, should be re-assigned to non-teaching tasks, or let go.

- * **Therefore:** School boards should have mandatory orientation courses and cultural sensitivity training to provide teachers with information and skills to deal with diversity and the complex issues confronting many students today. Mechanisms should be developed to monitor teacher performance on equity and inclusion issues, and supports provided to enable them to deal with emerging social situations. Teachers need to learn ways to better communicate with parents, and connect with diverse students to make them feel part of the education process so that they stay in school and graduate.
14. *Many students are familiar with the 'normal routine', and are tired of receiving presentations that have little, or no impact on them. From the consultations, students feel that 'talks' should be age-appropriate. Talks to younger grades do not have the same effect on older students. Using victims and perpetrators of offences or crimes changed by the experiences can have a better chance of influencing kids. Prevention is the key, and teaching kids to realize risks, consequences, and how to avoid making the same mistakes will make a difference. An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. Students need relevant information to make responsible decisions and wise choices about life, and risky behaviour such as drug abuses and the consequences.*
- * **Therefore:** Schools should invite guest speakers and resource people who can deliver "shock value" in their presentations to warn students about the consequences of bullying, violence, discrimination, abuse of drugs and alcohol, and so forth. Dealing with serious issues, and inappropriate behaviour in the same casual and simple ways does not seem to have the desired effects among youth at-risk because these problems are growing.
15. *Teachers and school staff are role models who should lead by example. Many young people talk about how some of the figures of authority fail to connect with them because of bad attitudes and no respect. Arrogance and talking down, reflects the experiences many at-risk kids have at home. Duplicating the same poor treatment the kids are used to, creates frustration, resentment, at despair. A change in tactic, would, provide a valuable learning experience about humility, mutual respect, and can instil an appreciation of authority. Having professionals who get along well with youths to calmly talk with the students as the situation allows to let things cool down, can turn out to be a positive lesson on the life of troubled students.*

- * **Therefore:** Schools should have formal procedures and protocols with police services when dealing with students who breach the code of conduct, or commit criminal offences such as assault and violence. Principals, teachers and staff should uphold professional standards, and not talk-down to students. Even though the laying of charges involves police officers, schools should have a say on the process of arresting students in their facilities. For example, it must not be a humiliating, condescending or embarrassing situation to the youth. It should be a learning experience about mutual respect, humility and acknowledging the consequences.

16. *Regular consultations with students are important to learn first-hand about the issues affecting students. Liaisons can be done through student councils and class monitors. Random class visits by Trustees, school board administration, and school principals to hear first-hand the issues will also help to build trust with students. Partnering with community organizations, health and social agencies, and youth groups such as the RMYC will enable schools to hear other voices for reference and support.*

- * **Therefore:** All school boards should consult regularly with students, and youth in general on their issues. They should provide opportunities for dialogue, solicit input on school safety, and seek ideas to improve student retention and passing rates.

17. *The role of raising children has traditionally been left for the family. This served us well when mothers stayed at home to nurture kids, and the extended family was there to help with childrearing. The steady collapse of the family support structure due to pressures to seek employment to make ends meet, move to where jobs are, and family breakdowns, has created many problems for children and youth. Consequently, babysitters, daycare centres, the modern media and foster parents are all helping to raise kids.*

The steady increase in numbers of youth in care, many being raised by total strangers as wardens of the crown, speaks volumes what is happening to children. Many need protection from abuse, exploitation, and horrendous things they have experienced. As they grow up, some join street youth gangs for family. Others become homeless and try to survive on the streets, or end up in correctional facilities. Many are impacted by addictions, suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome, mental health and neglect. Some students use alcohol and drugs to cope and mask the hurt and pain.

- * **Therefore:** The education system has the capacity to respond to current social realities and make a difference. Through education, schools can transform children's unfortunate circumstances and give them hope. For several years now, the RMYC has been calling for the teaching of shared Canadian values and civil qualities in schools. This will influence manners, behaviour, attitude, morality, discipline, and other social values the youth need to be successful in life.

Our governments are investing heavily in the education system for economic growth purposes. Incorporating Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy as part of the Character Development curriculum will help to shape, mould and groom young people as responsible citizens. Teaching social skills, lifeskills, mutual respect, common courtesy, empathy, and social justice issues as part of regular courses will ensure that students feel included to reach their potential and realize their dreams.

The Ontario Ministry of Education should:

As the administrative body introducing Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and responsible for the implementation of the policies, the Ministry of Education should:

1. Monitor the implementation of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, enforce benchmarks set for schools to develop and implement complementary policies, and support community groups such as MANWO/RMYC as stakeholders in the process.
2. Continue to involve students to gather input and feedback on inequities in education, ensure that students' voices are heard, all students are included and treated fairly, and engaged to become part of the solution to problems they face at school.
3. Acknowledge the reasons students feel excluded or are not treated fairly, and support school boards, teachers and staff with resources and training to deal with all forms of discrimination including racism, homophobia, appearance and weight, as well as social issues such as alcohol and drug addictions, bullying, mental health, poverty, violence and so forth that have been identified as priorities by students.

4. Support breakfast programs, after-school activities, summer school, science camps, early childhood education and other proactive initiatives that help to bridge social gaps, reduce inequities, and level the playing field so that all students feel included, and are treated equitably to realize their learning potential and reach their academic goals.

6. Explore and invest in new ways to ensure that newcomer, Aboriginal and other minority youths feel included so that more can feel welcome and safe in our schools. According to Statistics Canada and Correctional Service Canada, more than 80 per cent of young offenders in federal institutions have below grade 10 education; 65 per cent have less than grade 8. Improving the learning environment so that more students stay in school and graduate will not only benefit the individual student by providing more career opportunities, increasing productivity and improving the standard of living. This will make our communities safer and save on costs by reducing the numbers of young offenders.

7. Give course credits to students who show leadership and are actively involved in engaging their peers at school to create a safer, more equitable and inclusive learning environment in their schools. The Ministry already gives credits for co-operative education and students require 40 hours of community service to graduate. Therefore rewarding peer leadership and student engagement is a great incentive to motivate and mobilize more students to benefit from the Ministry's and school boards equity and inclusive education policies.

8. Continue to promote Reach Every Student, Energizing Ontario Education *Reach Every Student, Energizing Ontario Education (Winter, 2008. Character Development, Page 12. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/energize)*. *The goal is to engage students in their learning and social environment to enable them to better develop the skills and knowledge and grasp the opportunities that can help them reach their full potential, pursue life-long learning, and contribute to a prosperous, cohesive society.*

9. Continue to monitor social situations such as poverty, obesity, mental health that have a negative impact on students and develop policies to address them. Initiatives to deal with poverty, mental health and obesity should be supported and enhanced.

10. Consult with the Ontario Parent Council, local School Councils, educators and students on best ways to engage the community in debates on the role the education system should play in creating a healthy learning environment that fosters healthy communities and creates responsible citizens. As society evolves and becomes more diverse, the economic situation and employment prospects change, and opportunities for equal participation become scarce, we need to promote equity and inclusion in order to maintain harmony and unity among all citizens.

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities:

1. *Schools play important roles to educate, socialize and equalize social status. They can promote common values we share in a multicultural and diverse society to create responsible citizens. In spite of backgrounds, schools have the capacity to open doors and transform a child's life to make it better. But, it is the school principals and teachers who can make the difference. Therefore, it is important to recruit educators with the qualities, skills, and ability to connect and inspire students to realize their potential.*
- * **Therefore:** The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities should review the selection process for teachers, and credit "people skills" to complement academic qualifications of applicants. Student engagement is a priority, and schools need teachers who are resourceful to motivate and inspire students to learn. Good communication skills, being culturally sensitive, and having a pleasant personality are valuable assets to connect with students, help them to learn, stay in school, and succeed.

Teachers' Unions:

1. *Teachers' unions exist for their members, but should realize that students and schools that determine their essence. Teachers make a big impact on society because we all have to go through the education system. It is important to ensure that good teachers who can make a difference stay, and those who fail to deliver leave, or are let go.*
- * **Therefore:** Teachers' Unions should collaborate with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and school boards to monitor teacher performance based on benchmarks for student success, and/or class evaluations.

The Ontario Government:

1. *The federal government is responsible of First Nations education and currently there are inequities in funding levels between aboriginal and non-aboriginal students. Status First Nations students get less funding per-capita compared to their non-Aboriginal peers. This inequity contributes to some of the academic and social problems aboriginal students face when they attend urban schools resulting in marginalization and-exclusion from participating in mainstream school activities. This is a growing problem as more First Nations people move to urban centres and the enrolment of Aboriginal students in public schools requiring academic up-grading and literacy support increases.*

- * **Therefore:** The Ontario government should insist that the federal government and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in particular provide adequate funding for First Nations education. Presently, status First Nations students receive less funding per-capita as non-Aboriginal or non-status counterparts. With issues such as intelligence, clothes, poverty, family wealth, and so forth as common grounds students are excluded, many Aboriginal students are trapped, and it will require more than Equity and Inclusive Education policies to change the status. Addressing the funding inequity should be a priority investment if Aboriginal students are to do well academically.

2. *The legacy and inter-general impacts of residential schools are unique to Aboriginal children and youth. The consequences are far reaching, and affect the students' ability to do well in school. With issues such as poverty, addictions, mental health, abuse, crime, violence, fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal alcohol effects, disproportionately rampant in Aboriginal communities, this often leads to stereotyping, name-calling and other negative labels students endure, and try hard to avoid with higher risks of dropping out of school.*

- * **Therefore:** The Ontario government should work with federal government to address unique and special needs of Aboriginal children and youth. With increasing numbers of aboriginal people moving to urban centres and their children attending publicly funded schools, the province should capitalize on the national apology in Parliament, and secure adequate resources for healing programs, treatment and supports needed to deal with the intergenerational impacts of residential schools for Aboriginal students to graduate.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

MANWO is very impressed with the enthusiasm of the RMYC and the Working Group for the Equity and Inclusive Education Project. Input from students and the community made the survey successful. We are grateful for the support and contribution from the adults, educators and parents who generously shared their ideas and experiences. In spite of cynicism by some participants that their opinions will be ignored, we hope that the recommendations will be viewed positively and acted on accordingly.

We are pleased that:

- Over 1,000 people participated in the summer barbecue neighbourhood consultations and heard about Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Many took the leaflets we handed out to read more about the strategy and share with others.
- All high school students (approximately six thousand) who attended classes the days of the survey heard announcements about the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and had access to leaflets about the strategy. Over 1,000 participated in the survey.
- All high school principals were involved with the RMYC Working Group to promote Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy project, and helped with the surveys.
- Through the project, publicity, handouts, and press coverage, more people are now aware of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.

We are pleased that the Ontario government and school boards are collaborating to implement the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. Schools want to do a better job of educating the nation, and boards of education, school principals, staff, teachers and their unions are working together to help students succeed. But, from this project, more work needs to be done to ensure that all stakeholders are engaged in creating a more welcoming and friendly learning environment in schools for all students to feel accepted, included, and to be treated fairly. MANWO and the RMYC want to continue being involved, and we urge the Ministry of Education to develop and support follow-up initiatives to enhance the implementation of equity and inclusion in our publicly-funded schools so that all students and society benefit from the policies.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

REVENUE:

Ministry of Education	\$5,000.00
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EXPENSES:

Project Co-ordination - Fees	\$ 800.00
Materials and Supplies	250.00
Printing and Photocopying Costs	550.00
Publicity and Promotion	200.00
Forums, Workshops, Meetings, Focus Groups	2,100.00
Transportation: 12 months @ \$50.00 a month	600.00
Project support: Resource people - Honoraria	500.00
Total	\$5,000.00



THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL/SANDI KRASOWSKI

Strategy shared with peers

Sir Winston Churchill high school Regional Multicultural Youth Council members, from left, Nathan Ogden, Celine Jalalifar, Jeevan Chahal, Simrun Chahal, Shane Wong, Samantha Smith and president Gurleen Chahal introduced the equity and inclusion education strate-

gy Wednesday by promoting safety, inclusion and anti-discrimination among their peers. The campaign, which continues this week, is expected to provide a better understanding of social issues that youth face.

QUICK FACTS

Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy

The Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy is designed to support an education system where all students in our publicly funded schools have the opportunity to achieve their highest potential.

Why an Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy?

Publicly funded education is a cornerstone of our democratic society. Ontarians share a belief in the need to develop students as learners and prepare them for their role in society as engaged, productive and responsible citizens. Yet, some groups of students – such as recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special education needs are just some of the groups that may be at risk of lower achievement. In *Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education*, the Ontario Ministry of Education outlined its plan to create the best publicly funded education system in the world. The paper identified three core priorities:

1. High levels of student achievement;
2. Reduced gaps in student achievement;
3. Increased public confidence in publicly funded education.

An equitable, inclusive education system is fundamental to achieving these priorities and is recognized internationally as critical to delivering a high-quality education for all learners (UNESCO, 2008). Thus, equity and excellence go hand in hand. Equitable, inclusive education is also central to creating a cohesive society and a strong economy that will secure Ontario's future prosperity.

Why now?

Canadians embrace multiculturalism, human rights, and diversity as fundamental values. However, there are ongoing incidents of discrimination in our society that require our continuing attention. Homophobia has risen to the forefront of discussion. Cyberbullying and hate propaganda on the Internet were not issues ten years ago but now are major concerns for parents and students. Racism, religious intolerance, homophobia and gender-based violence are still evident in our communities and – unfortunately – in our schools. Rejection, exclusion or estrangement are associated with behaviour problems in the classroom, lower interest in school, lower student achievement and higher dropout rates.

Ontario is Canada's most diverse province and must find solutions to these concerns. We must also address the needs of a rapidly changing and increasingly complex society by ensuring that our policies evolve with changing societal needs.

To date only forty-three of Ontario's seventy-two school boards report that they currently have some form of equity policy in place. Although there are increasing numbers of students from various faith communities in our schools, only twelve boards report that they have policies or guidelines relating to religious accommodation, and only three of those could be considered comprehensive. We need to strive to achieve a truly equitable and inclusive publicly funded education system, in keeping with our values of human rights and social justice.

VISION

We envision an inclusive education system in which:

- all students, parents and other members of the school community are welcomed and respected;
- every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning.

To achieve an equitable and inclusive school climate, school boards and schools will strive to ensure that all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable and accepted. We want all staff and students to value diversity and to demonstrate respect for others and a commitment to establishing a just, caring society.

What will the Strategy accomplish?

The Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy builds on successful government, ministry, school board and school initiatives that have already helped Ontario become a more fair and equitable society. In order to achieve equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools, we must pursue the following three goals:

1. **Shared and committed leadership** by the ministry, boards and schools will play a critical role in eliminating discrimination through the identification and removal of bias and barriers;
2. **Equity and inclusive education policies and practices** will support positive learning environments so that all students can feel engaged in and empowered by what they are learning; supported by the teachers and staff from whom they are learning; and welcome in the environment in which they are learning;
3. **Accountability and transparency** will be demonstrated through the use of clear measures of success and through communication to the public of our progress towards achieving equity for all students.

Who is involved?

The resulting equity and inclusive education strategy calls for:

- the ministry to provide direction, support and guidance to the education sector, so that every student has a positive learning environment in which to achieve his or her highest potential;
- each school board to develop and implement an equity and inclusive education policy and guidelines for the board and its schools; and
- each school to create and support a positive school climate that fosters and promotes equity, inclusive education and diversity.

How is the Strategy being implemented?

We recognize that embedding this Strategy into policies, programs and practices will take time, and involve phased-in implementation. The Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy is being implemented over the next four years beginning the 2008/09 school year through to the 2011/12 school year.

The Strategy outlines a series of annual action items that provide a clear direction for the Ontario education community to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to student achievement and celebrate diversity and respect for all in our schools. Although schools and boards may be at different places when it comes to equity and inclusive education policy and program development, it is our expectation that all schools and boards will demonstrate continuous progress towards meeting the needs of our diverse student population and our ever-changing society. By taking these actions, Ontario will be a global leader in building and sustaining an equitable and inclusive education system.

WHAT IS...

DIVERSITY: The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation and socio-economic status.

EQUITY: A condition or state of fair, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Posted on the EDU website (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.html>)

Ministry of Education
Inclusive Education Branch
13th Floor, Mowat Block
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1L2
Telephone (416) 326-8199
Facsimile (416) 325-7019

Ministère de l'Éducation
Direction de l'éducation inclusive
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MEMORANDUM TO: Moffat Makuto, Executive Director
Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario

FROM: Ruth Flynn, Director
Inclusive Education Branch

DATE: January 24, 2011

SUBJECT: Project Funding – Equity and Inclusive Education

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario (MANWO) - Regional Multicultural Youth Council for its interest in supporting the effective implementation of *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* by working with school boards in Northwest Ontario to raise awareness and make linkages with youth in small and isolated communities to remove barriers and increase access to improve student achievement. I am pleased to let you know your proposal has been approved.

Please find attached an electronic copy of the Transfer Payment Agreement between the Ministry and MANWO. Upon signature of the two copies of the contract, please send both copies to my attention at the above address. Please note that funding is to be spent in accordance with the terms and conditions as outlined in the Transfer Payment Agreement and in accordance with the Ministry's criteria. In keeping with government transfer payment directives, funding is to be used prudently with a focus on accountability and transparency. Travel, meal, accommodation and hospitality expenses are to demonstrate value for money and be considered necessary and economical with due regard for health and safety. Alcohol is not an eligible expense and is not to be served at events or meetings, nor can it be included as part of any individual meal, travel, accommodation or hospitality expense.

The interim project report will be submitted by October 3, 2011. The interim project report will summarize the activities, outcomes and resources planned including a budget of all projected costs. The final project report will be submitted by February 28, 2012. The final project report will outline a similar summary of activities, outcomes and resources that were completed as part of the project along with an accounting statement of the actual costs incurred.

The Ministry greatly appreciates the support, partnership and contributions of MANWO. I look forward to working with you to continue supporting the implementation of the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* and fostering a school system where all students, parents and members of the school community feel welcomed and respected, and every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.


Ruth Flynn
Director, Inclusive Education Branch



Catherine Siemieniuk
Director of Education
csiemieniuk@lakeheadschoools.ca

Jim McCuaig Education Centre
2135 Sills Street Thunder Bay ON P7E 5T2
Telephone (807) 625-5131 Fax (807) 622-0961

October 14, 2010

TO WHOM THIS MAY CONCERN:

I am pleased to write this letter in support of the Regional Multicultural Youth Council's (RMYC) application for funding to involve students in reviewing and promoting Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.

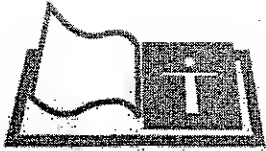
The RMYC is preparing a proposal to enhance the implementation of the Equity and Inclusion Education policies of school boards in the region. The goal is to ensure that all students are aware of the policies and realize the benefits.

The Lakehead District School Board has a positive working relationship with the RMYC. The Youth Council has facilitated workshops for student leaders at our Youth Embracing Diversity in Education Conferences. We also appreciate the Youth Council's initiatives to create safer schools and stronger communities.

The Lakehead District School Board will encourage students to participate in the project, provide input and feedback, as well as develop plans to monitor implementation of the policies. We hope that the RMYC will receive the funding needed to bring together students, educators and various community groups to create a healthier learning environment for all children, and make our schools safer.

Sincerely,

Catherine Siemieniuk
Director of Education



JOHN DE FAVERI
Director of Education, Secretary & Treasurer

THUNDER BAY CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

CATHOLIC EDUCATION CENTRE – 456 VICTORIA AVENUE WEST, – THUNDER BAY, ON P7C 0A4 – PHONE (807) 625-1555 – FAX (807) 623-0431

October 13, 2010

To whom it may concern:

Re: Support for RMYC's Equity and Inclusive Education Project

This letter is written in support of the Regional Multicultural Youth Council's application for funding to involve students in the review and promotion of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.

The Youth Council wants to work with community partners to enhance the development and implementation of the Equity and Inclusion Education policies being developed by the region's school Boards. The goal is to ensure that all students are aware of the policies, and provide input and feedback that will benefit them.

The Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board has had a positive working relationship with the RYMC for many years. We are aware of the contribution the group continues to make in working towards a fair and just society. We also appreciate the Youth Council's initiative to create safer schools and stronger communities.

The Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board will do its part to encourage students to participate in the project, realize higher levels of achievement, and increase public confidence in publicly funded education. We hope that the RYMC will receive the funding needed to bring together students, educators and the broader community to create a healthier learning environment for all children and to make our schools safer for all.

Sincerely,

John De Faveri
Director of Education

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario and the Regional Multicultural Youth Council gratefully acknowledges our sponsors and supporters of this project:

- * The Ministry of Education
- * Lakehead District School Board
- * Thunder Bay District Catholic School Board
- * Nishnawbe Aski Nation
- * Mandarin Restaurant
- * Tim Hortons – Waterloo Street

And the following RMYC Committee Members and the Equity and Inclusive Education Project Working Group Team for planning and organizing activities for this project:*

Elton Beardy*, Dallas Bertin*, Talon Bird, Donna Boyshkakin, Jonathan Campeau, Gurleen Chahal, Jeevan Chahal, Simrun Chahal, Johnny Dekka III, Dyna-ann Dolph*, Debbie Findlay, Candace Ferguson, Katrina Fiddler, Sarah Foglia, Genevieve Garcia*, Justin Gushulak*, Kelsey Huevo*, Michael Hyer*, Celine Jalalifer, Alyssa Johnston*, Stephanie Kawei, Kirstie Kennedy*, Kaine Kindla, Halie Knudson*, Meagan Latt*, Nyasha Makuto, Julian Mamakeesic, Casie Mathewson, Lilyanne McKay, Clyde Moonias*, Kristin Meeseetawageesic*, Nathan Ogden, Meghan Payment, Stefanie Perrier*, Samatha Smith, Quinn Spyрка, Meagan Uchtenhagen*, Celine Wick*, Shane Wong, and Moffat Makuto, Youth Advisor with the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario for guidance and administrative support.

For more information on this report please contact:

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